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硕 士 学 位 论 文

**Pursuing Harmony with Nature: on the  
Environmental Virtue Ethics of Henry David  
Thoreau's *Walden***

天人合一——论亨利·大卫·梭罗的《瓦尔登湖》所蕴含  
的环境美德伦理思想

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## Abstract

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), a key figure of ecological literature, has long been considered as a model for environmentalism. Recent years have witnessed increasing interests in Thoreau study at home and abroad. The “Beyond Thoreau: Literature’s Response to Nature” International Conference which was concluded in Tsinghua University last October is an example. However, a comparison of the Chinese and Western eco-study of Thoreau still shows a gap we face. The West has started the environmental ethics study since the 1980s. However, study from this perspective can hardly be found at home. Out of this concern, this thesis attempts to explore the environmental virtue ethics of *Walden*, the masterpiece of Thoreau.

As a branch of philosophy, ethics studies the norms for proper conduct and good living. It’s usually about interpersonal relationships. Different from consequentialism ethics and deontology ethics which focus on the norms for proper behavior, virtue ethics emphasizes the moral character of the individual and the flourishing of human beings. “Environmental virtue ethics” is a new dimension of virtue ethics. It gives systematic and comprehensive definition and interpretation on what an ethical man-nature relationship is and how to keep it, with focus more on what dispositions or attitudes we ought and ought not to have regarding the environment than on what we ought and ought not to do to the environment. The ideal for an environment virtue ethicist is to achieve man-nature excellence. When people witness environmental destruction, they would sometimes wonder: “what’s wrong with the sort of person who would do that?” This is because some immoral behaviors against the environment are not so serious as to reach a legal level. Generally speaking, legislature could only regulate behavior, not character, and policy can only measure actions, not attitude. It’s virtue ethics that’s regulating the operation of the entire society in the most fundamental way.

“**Introduction**” introduces the Thoreau study background at home and abroad as well as the purpose of this thesis. Investigations show that, although *Walden* is featured with its beautiful language, the difficulty in its language creates some hindrance to understand it comprehensively. The rise of Thoreau’s popularity

nowadays is closely related to people's gradual understanding of him and his works. It's also the result of a series of successful publishing ventures. *Walden* proceeds with a directional shift of its theme from focusing on "men in the society" with criticism on commercialism and discussion on how to lead a good life in the society in the first one third of the text to focusing on "man's joyful life in the woods" in the other two thirds of the text. As a result, domestic eco-critical researches of *Walden* always only focus on the analysis of the latter two thirds, ignoring the vital link between the beginning one third and the other two thirds of the text. I believe that the first one third of the text is about human excellence and the other two thirds is about environmental excellence. Therefore, *Walden* as a whole exemplifies the integrity of man-nature excellence—a model for a living with environmental virtue ethics.

As environmental virtue ethics is an emerging, cross-disciplinary applied ethics, and in order to make this thesis a more solid, valid and realistic one, **"Chapter 1 A Review of Environmental Virtue Ethics"** gives a brief theoretical introduction to environmental virtue ethics as well as the physical and cultural origins for its development. I believe that the modern environmental crisis and the American nature ideology provide fertile soil for the development of environmental virtue ethics. However, as science and technology are sometimes biased and not powerful enough to solve the crisis, environmental virtue ethics is a more fundamental and effective approach that we shall apply to improve the environmental problems and maintain the sustainability of our environment.

As *Walden* is autobiographical, **"Chapter 2 Genesis of Thoreau's Environmental Virtue Ethics"** explores the origins for the development of Thoreau's ecophilosophy. Firstly, the 19<sup>th</sup> century American industrialization and the environmental problems urged Thoreau to ponder on the question of "how can one lead life that is good for both man and nature?" Secondly, Thoreau was deeply influenced by the ancient Greek, Asian and Amerindian philosophy which call for the pursuit of man-nature harmony. The first two groups of philosophy, in particular, advocate the pursuit of inward spiritual excellence and take "cultivating one's moral character and temperament" as an ethical issue. These philosophies inspired Thoreau to understand and appreciate the natural world and explore the ways to become a virtuous person.



**“Chapter 3 Character Traits of Thoreau as an Ecologically Virtuous Person”** explores the character traits of Thoreau that are beneficial to man-nature excellence. Rigid economy, simplicity and freedom are among the first group of his character traits. They are about voluntarily putting economic pursuit in its subordinate proper position, the practice of which enables people to pursue inward excellence freely and let other non-human creatures simply live. Secondly, Thoreau also exhibits the character trait of ecological sensibility. Thoreau appreciates the nonanthropocentric intrinsic value of nature, never deliberately changes and exploits nature for unnecessary human use, and enjoys harmonious life in nature spiritually and aesthetically.

Based on the discussion in Chapter 3, **“Chapter 4 Environmental Ethics of Walden: Integrity of Man-nature Excellence”** takes a step further to explore how Thoreau maintains his relationship with nature in specific livelihood-making activities and how he realizes the man-nature excellence as an integrity. Fishing, hunting and farming are among the very few activities that Thoreau does to nature, through which conflicts between human beings’ needs and nature’s interests may arise. Thus, it makes sense to analyze how Thoreau thinks and acts in these aspects. In hunting, fishing and farming, Thoreau advocates the environmental ethics of vegetarianism and environmental preservation. Thoreau’s call for these ethics manifests his idea that human excellence intertwines with nature excellence. An analysis of Thoreau’s advocacy of environmental ethics shows that virtue plays an important role in his living in harmony with nature; on the other and, having its intrinsic value, nature excellence is fundamental to human flourishing.

**“Conclusion”** summarizes the thesis, points out challenges in the study of Thoreau’s environmental virtue ethics, and puts forwards the idea of advocating the cultivation of environmental virtue ethics. Currently, it may be difficult to require every modern citizen to practise Thoreau’s environmental virtue ethics in order to solve the modern environmental crisis. But through gradual efforts, maybe our future generations will do better than the current generation. Generally, we should at least try to publicize the following Thoreau’s ideas: 1) To put economic pursuit in its appropriate position, subordinating it to the pursuit of internal excellence. This may be accomplished by practising rigid economy and the doctrine of simplicity with supports

from the governmental sectors, writers, teachers, news media and the like; 2) To pursue the ancient virtues, including intellectual, physical, aesthetic and spiritual excellence. These virtues are not only beneficial to our personal flourishing, but also lead to nature excellence; 3) To cultivate our ecological sensibility. Always enjoy life close to nature, appreciate the beauty and sacredness of nature, and get to see the intrinsic value of nature rather than the anthropocentric value of it. 4) To practise vegetarianism and environmental preservation. As nature is silent and could not sue man's destruction of environment to court, an environmentally virtuous ethical person should take himself or herself as a moral protector of nature.

**Key Words:** Environmental Virtue Ethics; Henry David Thoreau; *Walden*

## 摘要

亨利·大卫·梭罗（1817-1862）是生态文学的关键代表人物之一，常常被捧为环境主义者的典范。目前，国内和西方批评界都非常重视梭罗的研究价值。去年10月份清华大学成功举办的“超越梭罗：文学对自然的反应”国际研讨会足以窥探梭罗研究的升温。但是，比较国内外的梭罗生态研究成果，不论在研究深度或广度，国内仍存在差距。西方评论界自20世纪80年代就开始研究梭罗的生态伦理思想，而国内对这方面的研究则寥寥无几。为此，本文将探讨梭罗的代表作——《瓦尔登湖》中所蕴含的环境美德伦理思想。

传统意义的伦理学研究的是人与人相处所应遵循的标准。与道义论伦理学、结果主义伦理学等关注行动所应当遵循的规则伦理学分支不同的是，美德伦理学强调以人类自身的内在品质作为人的一切生活的出发点，关注人类伦理生活所应采取的态度。“环境美德伦理学”是美德伦理学研究的一个新领域，它对人类和自然环境之间的道德关系给予系统性和全面性的定义和解释，它重视的是一个有德之人应具备的性格特点，而非定义人-环境行为的规则和义务，它的目标是人与自然共繁荣。简单地讲，“环境美德伦理学”探索了两个问题——“人应该如何对待环境”和“人应该具备什么样的品质，才能与环境和谐相处”。这是因为当出现某一环境破坏行为时，人们往往会问：“到底是什么样的人做了这么缺德的事？”。许多环境行为的严重性往往不足以上升到法律层面，法律和措施只能硬性规范人们的行为，而不能规范个性和态度。美德伦理是引导整个社会体系发展的最基本因素之一。

“引言”部分主要介绍了国内外梭罗的研究背景和本文的研究主旨。研究显示，梭罗的文字虽优美但生涩难懂，其作品发行量和研究知名度一直到20世纪后半叶才急剧提升。究其原因，这与人们对他的逐渐认识以及购买了其版权的出版社的准确市场定位是息息相关的。《瓦尔登湖》前1/3的内容主要是对商业主义的现实批判，探讨人如何定位自己在社会生活中的角色，而后2/3的内容则转而描述作者在林中的生活。国内对《瓦尔登湖》的生态批判研究目前尚停留在分析其生态中心主义思想的层面上，也就是侧重于后2/3内容的分析，忽视了前1/3

内容与后 2/3 内容的联系，缺乏对该作品的全面理解。我认为《瓦尔登湖》一书的主题涵盖了以下两个层面：一、批判商业、物质主义，提倡简朴、自由、人本身的内在发展，呼吁人们改变既有的生活模式；二、描述了作者与自然和谐共处的过程，赞美自然的非人类中心主义的内在价值（如精神和审美层面的），倡导人与自然共繁荣的理想生活。而这一主题正好是环境美德伦理生活的典范。

由于环境美德伦理学是一门新出现的、跨学科应用型伦理学，为使本文后半部分的讨论更具备现实意义，“**第一章 环境美德伦理介绍**”介绍了环境美德伦理学的基本理论观点及其发展的物质来源和文化来源。我认为当代的环境危机和美国的自然意识背景推动了环境美德伦理学的发展，但由于科学和政治手段都不足以应对当代环境危机，我们只有在全社会推广环境美德伦理思想才能更根本、更有效地改善环境问题。

《瓦尔登湖》具有自传性色彩，“**第二章 梭罗环境美德伦理思想的形成**”将梭罗环境美德伦理思想的发展追溯到两个来源上。第一、美国 19 世纪的工业化发展及其引发的环境问题启发梭罗思考：人应该过什么样的生活，才能对人本身和自然都有益？二、梭罗广受古代希腊、亚洲和美国印第安哲学的影响，它们都倡导人与自然和谐共处，且前两者都提倡人完善内心精神世界，将“修身养性”当作人的道德规范之一。这些哲学思想启发他认识大自然，思索如何才能成为有美德的人。

“**第三章 梭罗作为生态道德人的个性表征**”探讨了梭罗在《瓦尔登湖》一书中所体现和倡导的一些有助于人与自然共繁荣的个性品质。第一、梭罗体现了节约、简单、自由的个性品质。这些个性特征认为应该将经济追求放在次要地位，这样人才能自由地追求内心的发展，同时也让其它非人类生物自由地生存。第二，生态敏感性也是梭罗作为生态道德人所体现的个性。梭罗欣赏自然所具备的非人类中心主义价值，不刻意改变和索取自然，认为与自然和谐共处本身就是一种精神和审美享受。

基于第三章的讨论，“**第四章 《瓦尔登湖》的环境伦理表征：人与自然共繁荣**”进一步探讨梭罗如何在具体的人类活动当中处理与自然的关系，如何实践人与自然共繁荣的理想。捕鱼、打猎、农耕是梭罗在瓦尔登湖中的主要营生手段，在这些活动过程中他渐渐形成素食主义和环境保护等生态伦理思想。他倡导这些

伦理思想，认为人的全面发展（包括内心发展）与环境的繁荣是相辅相成的，美德指导他与自然和谐共处，而自然所具备的内在价值则反过来影响人的全面发展。

“结论”部分理顺本文各章节之间的关系，重申本文的观点，指出研究梭罗环境美德伦理思想所面临的难题和研究建议，并提出提倡环境美德伦理教育的建议。我认为对于当代环境问题的解决，现代人很难马上一一照搬梭罗的环境美德伦理思想，但是通过宣传、教育，人类的后代将比当代人做得更好。我们应该大力宣传、教育梭罗的以下几个观点：一、将追求人内心的全面发展放在首要地位，将经济追求放于次要地位，在整个社会提倡节约、简单、自由的生活观；二、倡导古代哲学思想衡量有美德的人所采用的标准——体魄、学识、审美和精神方面的全面发展；三、培养人的生态敏感性。倡导人亲近大自然，欣赏自然之美并尊敬自然之神圣，提倡以非人类中心主义认识自然的内在价值；四、倡导素食主义、环境保护等生态伦理思想。自然无法将人“告上法庭”，但一个具有环境美德伦理观念的人会自然而然地主动捍卫大自然的权利。

**关键词：**环境美德伦理；亨利·大卫·梭罗；《瓦尔登湖》

## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	i
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 1 A Review of Environmental Virtue Ethics</b> .....	10
1. Theoretical Introduction to Environmental Virtue Ethics.....	10
2. Physical Origin: the Anthropogenic Environmental Crisis.....	13
3. Cultural Origin: the American Nature Ideology.....	20
<b>Chapter 2 Genesis of Thoreau's Environmental Virtue Ethics</b> .....	28
1. Economic and Environmental Situation of the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century America.....	28
2. Ancient Greek, Asian and Amerindian Philosophy.....	31
<b>Chapter 3 Character Traits of Thoreau as an Ecologically Virtuous Person</b> .....	36
1. Rigid Economy, Simplicity and Freedom .....	36
2. Ecological Sensibility.....	50
<b>Chapter 4 Environmental Ethics of <i>Walden</i>: Integrity of Man-nature Excellence</b> .....	57
1. Fishing, Hunting and Vegetarianism.....	58
2. Farming and Environmental Preservation.....	65
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	77
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	81
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	86

## 目 录

摘要.....	i
引言.....	1
第一章 环境美德伦理思想介绍.....	10
1. 环境美德伦理学的理论观点.....	10
2. 环境来源：人为导致的环境危机.....	13
3. 文化来源：美国自然意识背景.....	20
第二章 梭罗环境美德伦理思想的形成.....	28
1. 美国第 19 世纪经济和环境背景的影响.....	28
2. 古代希腊、亚洲和美国印第安哲学的影响.....	31
第三章 梭罗作为生态道德人的个性表征.....	36
1. 节约、简单、自由.....	36
2. 生态敏感性.....	50
第四章 《瓦尔登湖》的环境伦理表征：人与自然共繁荣.....	57
1. 捕鱼、打猎与素食主义.....	58
2. 农耕与环境保护.....	65
结论.....	77
引用作品.....	81
致谢.....	86

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